



Executive Registry

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United States Department of State

*Assistant Secretary of State
for Inter-American Affairs**Washington, D.C. 20520*

May 12, 1986

I thought you might be interested in the attached
article from the Miami Herald.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Elliott Abrams".
Elliott Abrams

The Miami Herald

Sunday, May 4, 1986

These are tough times for foes of contra aid

By ELLIOTT ABRAMS

Aid to Nicaragua's democratic resistance may be stalled in Congress, but these are tough times nonetheless for opponents of administration policy. Far from gratitude or support from Managua, their reward is a series of Sandinista actions that demonstrate that instead of being benevolent social reformers, the Sandinistas are indeed a threat to Central America and to Western interests generally.

Once it was claimed that the administration misread the character of Nicaragua's government.

Elliott Abrams, assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, wrote this article for The Herald.

Having exhausted all defenses of the Sandinistas, opponents of aid to the resistance have shifted the focus of their attack.

Today, after years of censorship and repression, it is no longer possible to argue credibly that the Sandinistas are even latent democrats. The true Sandinista intentions have been revealed with each act of repression of their own people and each new act of terrorism and aggression against their neighbors. The latest wave of over 10,000

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Miskito refugees fleeing Sandinista attacks attests to the regime's viciousness.

One result is that Congress is no longer debating what the Sandinistas are; it is debating what the United States should do to prevent them from consolidating a Communist system in Nicaragua. There is general agreement that diplomatic pressure should be used, but there is deep disagreement over whether the Sandinistas will respond to diplomatic initiatives in the absence of the military pressure the resistance can provide. Again, the Sandinistas have answered that question for us.

In 1984, after Congress ended U.S. military aid to resistance forces, the Sandinistas did not negotiate — they kept their leading political opponents out of elections and brought in Soviet helicopter gunships in an attempt to shut off any further armed resistance. This spring, after the House of Representatives again voted down aid to the contras, Nicaragua



Abrams

struck into Honduras, then rejected all attempts to develop a comprehensive settlement at the

Contadora talks in Panama. Those in attendance at the negotiations had no doubt that the Sandinistas, not the United States, were responsible for the Contadora impasse.

All of this may leave opponents of aid to the resistance dispirited, but it apparently hasn't left them discouraged. Having exhausted all defenses of the Sandinistas, they have shifted the focus of their attack.

First comes the accusation that the contras are not broadly representative of the Nicaraguan nation. This charge is already several years out of date. With each passing month of Sandinista repression and economic malpractice, the resistance gains more recruits — it is now over 20,000 strong, with a rank and file that reflects the broad spectrum of Nicaraguan society. Today's resistance has more fighters than did the Sandinistas when Somoza fled in 1979. That they haven't yet won is a reflection of the Soviet and Cuban arming and training of a Sandinista army at least six times larger than anything Somoza ever had.

A second charge is that the contra forces are made up of Somocista guardsmen. In fact, the former national guardsmen participating in the resistance are far outnumbered, both in the leadership and in the ranks, by fighters with no past connection to the

National Guard. Indeed, most are too young to have served in the National Guard before the Sandinista accession to power.

A more recent tactic of administration critics is to charge that the resistance is embezzling money. Unsubstantiated charges have been made that privately raised funds have been misspent. It has also been asserted that humanitarian assistance provided by the U.S. government has been abused. Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, tells us that the contras have "socked away" \$7.1 million in U.S. humanitarian assistance funds — "I will bet my bottom dollar on it," he says. This canard found absolutely no support from the congressional General Accounting Office (GAO), which located no evidence of misuse of funds. GAO did find that the system Congress designed to administer the humanitarian assistance is not ideally suited to thorough monitoring of all transactions, especially in Central America, but this is hardly the fault of the resistance.

Then there are charges of drug trafficking. It is known that the resistance's lack of adequate supplies led to a search for alternative money sources. But we have no evidence that contra leaders whom we support are involved in drug trafficking. In fact, we know that they oppose it, and they know that the administration and Congress will stop aid to any resistance

group that tolerates it.

The final recourse has been to smear the political leadership of the resistance. One leader, Adolfo Calero, has been accused of disloyalty to the goal of democracy in Nicaragua. This charge, leveled by Sen. Harkin on the Senate floor, is a particularly irresponsible one to make against a man whose political career was forged in opposition to the Somoza dictatorship, who was once jailed for anti-Somoza activities and who was kept at arm's length by the Sandinistas precisely because he is a democrat.

Other top contra leaders such as Arturo Cruz and Alfonso Robelo proved their allegiance to democracy by leaving prestigious posts in the Sandinista government when it turned toward totalitarian rule and Soviet bloc alignment.

Scurrilous personal attacks do more than defame good people: They also distract attention from the solid political and organizational progress the resistance has made in recent months. This process began when the United Nicaraguan Opposition (UNO) was formed last June and continues today as all elements of UNO negotiate new democratic decision-making procedures that will clearly subordinate military forces to a representative civilian leadership. The continued cooperation of leaders such as Calero, Cruz and Robelo bodes well for the future and gives hope that still more opposition groups will join UNO, expand its political base and help shape its political program.

In this effort, and in the effort to address charges of human rights abuses and drug trafficking activity, UNO receives support from the administration and a bipartisan

group of members of Congress. This quiet bipartisan cooperation, a significant development, has been all but overshadowed by the heated legislative battles over the aid itself. It is clear to all concerned that for Nicaragua's resistance movement to succeed it must be as united and as democratic as the new Nicaragua it hopes to create.

As our debate continues, shifting from issue to issue and from charge to charge, we should remind ourselves that our deliberations may one day become academic. While we are talking, the Soviets, Cubans and Sandinistas are acting. Their strategy to destroy Nicaragua's civil and military opposition proceeds apace. That was the reason for the raid into Honduras, and it is the reason for continued internal repression such as the closing of the Catholic Church radio station and the censorship of *La Prensa*, two independent media of communication that once reached a large segment of the population.

Politically and militarily, the Nicaraguan freedom fighters can exert immense pressure on the Sandinista regime. Given the lack of any American military aid for two years, their progress has been remarkable. But the latent strength of the resistance cannot materialize without substantial and timely U.S. aid. It will be a tragedy for our Nicaraguan neighbors and for the hemisphere's democratic ideal if the prolonged indecision of the United States denies the resistance of Nicaragua the chance to bring a just peace to its long-suffering, repressed people.